

critical digest

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T. M. KRAUS

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New York Theatre Diary

The Prescott Proposals-Broadhurst 12/16/53. Leland Hayward presents Howard Lindsay & Russell Crouse comedy-drama on the UN. Lindsay directed cast headed by Katharine Cornell. Felix Aylmer, Lorne Greene, Roger Dann are featured...Oh, Men! Oh, Women!-Miller 12/17/53. Cheryl Crawford, in association with Anderson Lawler, present a new comedy by Edward Chodorov about a psychoanalyst who is informed of his fiancée's past by an unsuspecting patient. Franchot Tone, Betsy von Furstenberg, Gig Young featured.

Current Theatre Reviews

Almanac-Imperial 12/10/53. New John Murray Anderson revue, presented by Grace, Gilkey and Rigby, won a majority of favorable opinions from NY daily reviewers who found it fun-filled. For the most part the players, not the sketches or music, won the interest of the aisle-men. American debut of British favorite Hermione Gingold was cheered by all. Others to receive praise-worthy notices are Billy de Wolfe, Harry Belafonte, Orson Bean, Polly Bergen and Carleton Carpenter. Atkinson, Times, who filed a rave, billed show as a funny harlequinade in which the humor is almost continuous, light and mocking. Critic enjoyed sketches in revue written by Jean Kerr, wife of the Herald Tribune critic. Chapman, News, found it light of heart, light of foot, smartly designed, costumed and staffed. While Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun, decided it is a merry-go-round, lively, sparkling and wittily diverting. 3 mild con votes were filed by Herald Tribune, Post and Journal American critics. The best Kerr, Herald Tribune, could say for revue which included 2 sketches for his spouse, was that it is passable entertainment, pleasant, placid and surprisingly reminiscent of the wonders of Radio City Music Hall. In spite of certain virtues, Watts, Post, was forced to admit revue is better in its parts than as a whole. Over-all he feared it was in-and-out entertainment. Though everything is big, bright and beautiful, McClain, Journal American, discovered many dull pages in the Almanac, making the good outweighed by the weary.

Richard III- City Center -12/9/53. Majority of NY daily critics thought Jose Ferrer tackled too difficult a play and role for the 3rd limited run production of his series. Only 3 critics voted pro. Chapman, News, suggested viewers relax and enjoy some stirring speeches and witness some exciting scenes. McClain, Journal American, rated it most facile production attempted to date of Shakespeare's cumbersome chronicle. Dash, Women's Wear, enjoyed the superb drama performed by an excellent cast. This includes Ferrer, Vincent Price, Florence Reed, Jessie Royce Landis, Douglas Watson. All praised ingenious sets by Richard Whorf and direction by Margaret Webster. Most of con voters agreed that lack of rehearsal time was the main ingredient for the evening's failure. Ferrer does not have the force, eloquence or stature for heroic acting in a poetic play, added Atkinson, Times. Except for the bloody final scene, Kerr, Herald Tribune, noted little exhilarating. Watts, Post, filed a negative verdict for a different reason. Unlike his colleagues, Watts thought the star should have, and could have, done better with the difficult role.

Hits Revisited

End As A Man, which moved to the Lyceum, is still engrossing, powerful theatre given a sharply effective performance, okays Sheaffer, Eagle... After 9 months Picnic still comes through as a vital, often touching play, notes Hilt, Variety.

 ' Village Theatre '

Ticket reservations are accepted via phone at Phoenix GR 7-0713...Joseph Anthony will stage Leslie Stevens' Bullfight opening Jan 14 at Theatre de Lys. Acting Workshop at Circle in Square will present its student-actors in group of one act plays Dec 14...The Country Girl is presented at Green Room Theatre, 145 Bleecker on week-ends.

Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles, Shaw play presented at Davenport Theatre by Vaughan-James productions, receives a poor production in both acting and directing departments, pans Greenberg, Show Business.

 ' Off Broadway '

Franz Werfel's Goat Song presented by Equity Library Theatre Dec 16-20...Blackfriars Guild next production is Praise of Folly by John McGiver...Hunter College Players presented a revue, High Spirits, Dec 11-12.

Chicken Little, a one act musical comedy presented by Spring Valley, NY Choral Group, directed by Frank Baker, enjoyed by Hewes, Saturday Review. Musical fable by Alec Wilder and William Engvick sparkled with humor and glowed with spirit.

 ' Vaudeville '

New Palace show features Archie Robbins, Senor Cortez, the Fleetwoods, McFarlandd and Brown, George Hopkins and the Martin Brothers...Current Music Hall presentation of "The Nativity" seems shorter than usual to Variety mugg, but the sense of reverence and spectacle is still perserved. While revue portion has an entertaining pace.

 ' Yiddish Theatre '

Struggle for the Negeb opens the 40th season of Folkvibes on Dec 12-16 week run.

 * TUNE WNBC(NYC) BEN GRAUER *
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 * Day after Openings. *
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 * "CD" prepares brief reviews *
 * of quotes. *
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 ' Broadway TV Theatre '

The Last of Mrs. Cheyney, Frederick Lonesdale's 1924 comedy-melodrama, will be presented by Broadway TV Theatre, WOR-TV Dec 14-18. Vicki Cummings and Tom Helmore are featured in the TV production. Play originally opened at the Fulton Theatre on Nov 9, 1925 with Ina Claire, A.E. Matthews and Roland Young. It was a Charles Dillingham production. It ran for 252 performances.

Times critic (name not given) called it an engagingly lively play, well acted. Hammond, Herald Tribune, rated it minor Lonesdale, half play and half musical comedy. Anderson, Post, added that it was a light, clever play. While Gabriel, Sun, filed a dissent. He feared it was mere hackneyed repartee.

 ' Theatre Book Comments '

"Curtain Time", Lloyd Morris (Random House) history of US theatre, added 2 more pro reviews from critics. Chapman, News, rates it a lively history, while Pollock, Saturday Review, notes that author is one of the theatre's most ardent lovers and that he writes about it with devotion and equanimity.

"The Oliviers" by Felix Barker (Lippincott) praised by Dolbier, Saturday Review, and Coleman, Mirror. Former found it an absorbing biography, while latter thought it also offered an invaluable insight into the development of the modern English theatre.

 ' Green Room Department '

USEFUL DRAMA CRITICS...The NYC newspaper strike pointed out the usefulness to the theatre ticket buyer of the drama critics, points out Dash, Women's Wear. Without drama critics it would take the public longer to find out about a hit or a flop, but the results would be the same. After viewing all sides of one of the theatre's eternal debates, the critic has decided that critics are frequently useful, but that the public will make up its own mind too.

O'NEILL OBITS...The US theatre has been shamefully neglectful of O'Neill, notes Watts, Post, and he hopes that now, in its usual ironical way, it will begin to appreciate him...O'Neill was the first writer to lift our stage to the level of art and at his death he was still our leading dramatist, states Sheaffer, Eagle...A full size picture of O'Neill at work, stripped to the waist, churning out pages of copy should be hung in every English class at every college to remind young writers that genius and dedication to labor are closely allied, suggests Sullivan, News.

CITY CENTER BIRTHDAY...Congratulating the NY City Center on its 10th birthday, a Times editorial hopes that it will live for centuries. The youthful city institution, which has the blessing of the city government, but depends almost wholly on box-office and private subscription, is known the world over in artistic circles. The first dramatic production there in 1943 was Gertrude Lawrence in Susan and God.

STRUGGLING ACTRESSES...Two TV shows considered the problems of the young actress in NYC. NBC TV Excursion dramatized the problems of Nancy Franklin. The young actress was shown working with speech teacher Marian Rich and fencing instructor George Santelli. Robert Lewis, Teahouse of August Moon director, showed how such a girl may still be fired on the 5th day of rehearsal of a new show. CBS-TV Eye on NY interviewed Lisa Howard, Ohio, Peggy O'Hara of Pennsylvania, Rawn Harding, Florida and Grace Raynor, Brooklyn. The girls agreed that trying to be an actress in NY was difficult, but none seemed ready to give up. Film clips from the new film "The Actress" with Spencer Tracy and Jean Simmons were shown.

COLUMN TIPS...Josh Logan, friends hear, is at his NY town house, mending fast, items Winchell...Ethel Merman received \$25,000 for her appearance on NBC TV Jimmy Durante show, reports Eaton...Can You Dance, musical show, is offering shares of the show to prospective backers to be presented to friends as gifts, notes Variety.

 ' Pros & Cons by TMK '

 ' "CD" Gift Coupon '

The frankness displayed on the 2 above mentioned TV shows concerning the problems of young actresses in NYC is refreshing. Before this most of the available articles on the subject encouraged one and all to rush to NY after playing the lead in the high school play. These TV shows certainly will not, and should not, discourage the ambitious and talented. But they will certainly cut down on the estimated 20,000 who make Broadway their goal per year.

THEATRE NEWSLETTER-weekly digests NYC theatre news, reviews, comments. Tickets, critics reports. Drama books, records. Year round features. Ideal gift for "stage-struck" fans, students, etc. \$10 year. \$12.50 foreign, \$25 for 3 years includes free Merman-Martin LP Disc. Compiled by "Broadway in Brief" columnist.

Name.....

Address.....

NYC newspaper strike was settled in its 11th day. Surveys of Broadway theatre business show that the lack of advertising and publicity on current shows via the daily newspapers had slight effects on their business. Traditionally business slows down between the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. Radio and TV publicity and advertising were used during the strike by most producers. The "opening night celebrity interview" show which "Kismet" producers presented on WNBT (NYC) was also used by "John Murray Anderson's Almanac". While cast members from the new shows appeared on many regular interview radio and TV shows.

Plays

End: As A Man moves to Lyceum Dec 17... Wonderful Town will close during Christmas week, re-opening Dec 26... Loew's Lexington at 50th St being considered by Edwin Lester as a possible legit musical house... The King of Hearts, a new play by Jean Kerr and Eleanor Brooke, will be directed by Kerr, Herald Tribune... By the Beautiful Sea has moved up its opening date to March 25... Dial M For Murder will also recess Dec 21-25, resuming Dec 26.

People

Douglas Watson and Phyllis Love have featured roles in The Confidential Clerk and The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker... Jose Quintero will re-stage In the Summer House... Mary Astor and Eva LeGallienne co-star in The Starcross Story... Bretaigne Windust has joined CBS TV as staff producer-director... Frank Fay returns in Harvey for a west coast run.

Other Broadways

Add Shirley Booth Awards: Harvard's Hasty Pudding Club has chosen the gal as the most nearly representative of the ultimate ideal of people in show business... 3 British art groups are contesting the Shaw will leaving \$1 million to further the use of a new alphabet... Peter Ustinov's new London play No Sign of the Dove was panned by critics and audience, and was booed at final curtain... Paris' newest hit is Jean Paul Sartre's reworking of Dumas Kean, a play about the English actor.

Theatre Book Notes

"On a Stage, Taking Notes", the memoirs of English actor-manager Wilson Barrett will be published next year... Florida Friebus is writing "Lunt-Fontanne Life Story"... "Dramatists of Today", critical essays by British critic J.C. Trewin, published by Staples Press, 70 East 45th St.

Theatre TV & Radio Notes

Jane Cowl has adapted her great hit Smilin' Through for ABC TV Kraft Theatre Dec 17... "The Vaudeville Show" will present vaudeville old timers who played the Palace on ABC TV... Richard II with Maurice Evans on NBC TV Hall of Fame Jan 24

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